
The Social and Political Role of Libraries in Delivering Information and e-Government Services.

Norma McDermott, Director, An
Chomhairle Leabharlanna

Outline



- Definitions
- Context
- The European Agenda
- Requirements for success and sustainability
- The role of public libraries
 - Some examples
- Conclusion

Definitions



- *The EU defines eGovernment as ‘the use of information and communication technology in public administrations combined with organisational change and new skills in order to improve public services and democratic processes and strengthen support to public policies’.*
- It notes: ‘the potential of eGovernment goes far beyond the early achievements of online public services’.



- Viviane Reding, Information Society and Media Commissioner:
 - ‘We are starting to see benefits from Europe’s investments in ‘eGovernment’ over the last few years, but we need to be more active in learning lessons from each other and getting the benefits of scale from adopting common approaches across borders. eGovernment is no longer just a political toy, it is the essential tool of government, for modernising Europe’s public administrations.’

i2010 eGovernment Action Plan

(25/04/06)



- The Action Plan focuses on five major objectives for eGovernment with specific objectives for 2010:
 - **No citizen left behind:** advancing inclusion through eGovernment so that by 2010 all citizens benefit from trusted, innovative services and easy access for all;
 - **Making efficiency and effectiveness a reality** – significantly contributing, by 2010, to high user satisfaction, transparency and accountability, a lighter administrative burden and efficiency gains;
 - **Implementing high-impact key services** for citizens and businesses - by 2010, 100% of public procurement will be available electronically, with 50% actual usage, with agreement on cooperation on further high-impact online citizen services;
 - **Putting key enablers in place** - enabling citizens and businesses to benefit, by 2010, from convenient, secure and interoperable authenticated access across Europe to public services;
 - **Strengthening participation and democratic decision-making** - demonstrating, by 2010, tools for effective public debate and participation in democratic decision-making.

i2010 eGovernment Action Plan



- Member States have committed themselves to inclusive eGovernment objectives to **ensure that by 2010 all citizens, including socially disadvantaged groups, become major beneficiaries of eGovernment, and European public administrations deliver public information and services that are more easily accessible and increasingly trusted by the public, through innovative use of ICT, increasing awareness of the benefits of eGovernment and improved skills and support for all users.**

i2010 eGovernment Action Plan



- Two major objectives are of particular interest to public libraries:
 - **No citizen left behind:** advancing inclusion through eGovernment so that by 2010 all citizens benefit from trusted, innovative services and easy access for all;
 - **Strengthening participation and democratic decision-making** - demonstrating, by 2010, tools for effective public debate and participation in democratic decision-making.

i2010 eGovernment Action Plan



- The other three objectives cannot be ignored:
 - **Making efficiency and effectiveness a reality** – significantly contributing, by 2010, to high user satisfaction, transparency and accountability, a lighter administrative burden and efficiency gains;
 - **Implementing high-impact key services** for citizens and businesses - by 2010, 100% of public procurement will be available electronically, with 50% actual usage, with agreement on cooperation on further high-impact online citizen services;
 - **Putting key enablers in place** - enabling citizens and businesses to benefit, by 2010, from convenient, secure and interoperable authenticated access across Europe to public services;

i2010 Digital Libraries Initiative



- The **i2010 Digital Libraries Initiative** is of significant interest to all librarians.
- The initiative is evidence that the Commission recognises the value of library and information services.
- We in the library community must ensure that our voices are heard as the initiative is developed.
- We must also ensure that we have the capacity to deliver.

i2010 eGovernment Action Plan



- Returning to the objectives of the eGovernment Action Plan –
 - **No citizen left behind:** advancing inclusion through eGovernment so that by 2010 all citizens benefit from trusted, innovative services and easy access for all.
- Public libraries are of course ‘trusted’ and ‘innovative’, and they provide ‘easy access for all’.
- It is important to note that Internet access is not universal, even in developed countries:
- Households with access to the Internet:
 - Ireland - 45%
 - UK - 52% (includes access from outside home);
 - EU - 48%.
- Internet Usage:
 - Ireland - 44.5%;
 - UK - 64%;
 - EU – 43%. The same number has NEVER used the Internet;
- There are wide differences in usage according to location, age, sex, socio-economic factors:
 - e.g. 79% of students are regular users, while 32% of unemployed people are;
 - In 6 countries, the proportion of individuals never having used the internet is higher than the number of regular users.

Success and Sustainability



- 4 elements are crucial to the success and sustainability of e-governance:
 1. Political role of provision and democracy in action;
 2. Clear policy and sustainability of the service being top priority;
 3. Participation and Access;
 4. Commitment to Quality and empowerment.

Success and Sustainability



1. Political role of provision and democracy in action:
 - ❑ Central support, including investment in excellent quality information, simply presented;
 - ❑ Appropriate funding;
 - ❑ Continual training;
 - ❑ Constant availability of expertise
 - from EU national, regional and local government
 - ❑ Tie-up between relevant services including assessment of online information gaps (see 4 below)

Success and Sustainability



2. Clear policy and sustainability of the service being top priority:

- Follow through with demonstrating the value through appropriate levels of staff and management

Success and Sustainability



3. Participation and Access:

- ❑ Partnerships (Public, Private, Community and Voluntary pillars);
- ❑ Clear understanding and delineation of roles as between providers and interactive ICT support mechanisms and advocates and activists and consumers.

Success and Sustainability



- ## 4. Commitment to Quality and empowerment:
- ❑ Accuracy
 - ❑ Relevance and timeliness;
 - Our users want the right information, book or service in the right place at the right time. It should not matter who is supplying the service and how that service is provided.
 - ❑ Awareness and responsiveness to the public;
 - ❑ Continual feedback and refinement of the service.

The Social and Political Role of public libraries



- This purpose [of the public library], generally accepted for public libraries worldwide, has not been changed by the ICT revolution. The purpose of public libraries is still to further democracy, equality and social justice, increase access to information, disseminate culture and knowledge, contribute to a meaningful and informative leisure time, and act as a communal institution and a social meeting place.

The Social and Political Role of public libraries



- How will libraries continue and develop their roles in eGovernment?
- Through doing what they always have done. In the words of the *UNESCO Public Library Manifesto*,
 - ‘The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups’.
 - Every day public libraries provide access to the world of the imagination; to the cultural memory of communities and society at large, and to sources of information and knowledge.
- And through specific projects.

Some library projects in Ireland



- Europe Direct – www.europedirect.ie
 - Provision of easy, personalised access to EU information through the public library;
 - Trained staff and a wide range of documentation and multimedia information, facilities can put users in touch with full-time help desks manned by English-speaking experts.
 - Freephone access to a live Q&A service, free PC access to email questions and browse EU online services and expertly trained staff answer questions about Europe and what it does.
 - Covers six counties across Ireland with an initial focus on Fingal, Longford, Galway, Donegal, Cork and Limerick. This network covers a spectrum of urban and rural environments, while maintaining accessibility from any part of the country.
 - Covers 24 of the 25 countries
 - The initiative hopes to increase the general level of understanding and endorsement of EU priorities and activities in the general public and to enable the public to participate in debate and discussion about the EU.

Some library projects in Ireland



■ Lifesteps

- ❑ An initiative of Irish public libraries, funded by the Information Society Fund, through the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.
- ❑ The Lifesteps project consists of 17 guides, which explain how to achieve various life steps using the Internet. These guides are also available on the project website www.lifesteps.ie.
- ❑ Guides include: Internet Basics; Buying a Home; Family Health; Family History; Farming; Finding a Job; Government Information; Learning to Drive; Music; Reading; Research; Retirement; Shopping; Start your Own Business; The 1st Two Years; Travel; Writing.

Some library projects in Ireland



- Lifesteps' success:
 - 20,000 of each of the initial 17 titles were distributed to all of the libraries in October 2005 with a further 20,000 distributed last week.
 - Six new guides have been produced: Art, Gardening, Sport, Affordable Housing, Public Libraries and E-Learning.
 - **13,000** visitors to site since last October, and **1.5 million** hits.

Some library projects in Ireland



- Changing Libraries Project
 - Bringing together a number of new and recently developed online resources to provide the public with free access to a comprehensive collection of information
 - Establish a sound infrastructure through the enabling of broadband to all 351 public library branches.
 - Develop and provide for the public, a comprehensive online local studies, genealogy, reference and general interest service through partnership with public and private bodies.

Some library projects in Ireland



- ❑ Changing Libraries cont.
- ❑ The service will include the provision of:
 - ❑ Historical Maps;
 - ❑ The 1901 and 1911 census;
 - ❑ Tithe Applotment Books;
 - ❑ Griffith's Valuation;
 - ❑ www.AskAboutIreland.ie
- Enable the national marketing and promotion of a uniform, progressive service, aimed at satisfying users' requirements.

Some library projects in Ireland



- Changing Libraries' success:
 - www.askaboutireland.ie:
 - In last twelve months there have been **3 million visitors** to the site and **9.3 million hits**
 - Delivery of real services, free at point of use, to the public, through partnerships:
 - Historical maps - Ordnance Survey of Ireland
 - Census and other data sets – National Archives

Some library projects in Ireland



- eGovernment Research Project
 - Project to address the delivery of e-Government service through public libraries.
 - Run by Dublin City Council Public Libraries with support of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna.
 - Number of pilot services: marketing and promotional activities; staff assistance for users; public training using *Lifesteps*; targeted information sessions; partnership with services such as motor tax.

Why library projects matter



- **Having** access to quality-assured, authoritative content...
 - enables
 - acquisition of Knowledge
 - exploitation in new and existing markets
 - generation of new, value added, content and services
 - incentivises
 - development and use of ICT skills
 - learning and engagement
 - take-up of Broadband
 - demonstrates
 - visible (and 'cuddly') benefits of Joined Up Government and e-Government.
- (Paul Miller, JISC)

Conclusions



- Some progress has been made in developing eGovernment but significant challenges remain - as our Taoiseach says, 'a lot done, more to do'.
- The figures for Internet usage show that no one can be complacent.
- Easy of access must be a priority for those who are developing eGovernment services.

Conclusions -



- **The EU has set ambitious targets:**
 - **No citizen left behind:** advancing inclusion through eGovernment so that by 2010 all citizens benefit from trusted, innovative services and easy access for all;
- Public Libraries can bridge the digital divide – they are trusted, are being innovative, and do provide ease of access for all.

Conclusions – the Challenge



- The Geneva Principles capture what is required:
 - We ... declare our common desire and commitment to build a **people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented** Information Society, where everyone can **create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge**, enabling **individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential** in promoting their sustainable development and improving their **quality of life** ...
- The mission of the public library is a perfect match for these principles. The Geneva Principles could easily serve as a mission statement for the public library service.